

23-year chronology of John Clark Donahue

October 1961

John Clark Donahue, 23, and three others, including a psychiatrist, are charged with sodomy involving a boy in Minneapolis as part of a homosexual ring. Donahue pleads guilty to a lesser charge of indecent exposure and gets a 90-day jail sentence, which is stayed. The next month he is fired from his teaching job at Sandburg Junior High in Redwoodale.

1962

Donahue joins Moppet Players, a children's theater formed the year before, as painter, set designer, teacher and associate director.

July 1965

Donahue and Moppet's administrator John Davidson take members of Moppet's to the Mine Apella Institute of Arts and organize the Children's Theatre Company. Davidson is named managing director and Donahue artistic director.

October 1965

"Sleeping Beauty," the first production of Children's Theatre, opens.

1969

The theater launches its school.

Spring 1979

Minneapolis police hear rumors of sexual abuse at the Children's Theatre, but after about a month of investigating fail to nail down any facts, says former police Captain Rob Mudge.

August 1981

Minnesota Bureau of Criminal Apprehension (MBCA) Special Agents Paul Gerber and Patrick Shannon begin an investigation focusing on Donahue.

September 1981

A warrant is issued for the arrest of David Alan Ripstein, 33, music and urban arts teacher at South High School, in connection with production of pornographic movies involving boys in Minneapolis. He flees to Paris, returns in October 1982 and is sentenced in May 1983 to a year in the workhouse through plea bargaining. Rumorously, Ripstein complained that cops against Donahue, but Ripstein later denies he had useful information.

April 1982

The BCA opens file No. 82000421 "based on allegations of criminal sexual conduct being perpetrated on male children at hands of John Clark Donahue." Sources begin supplying information to the BCA about "Donahue being sexually inappropriate with preadolescent and adolescent boys."

October 1982

Theater officials say they were first contacted by the BCA about the investigation. They later say that the BCA "asked not to say anything" to parents about investigation. The BCA denies this.

February 1984

The BCA investigation against Donahue gains momentum when an informant brings forth detailed and solid information, according to Jack Erskine, BCA head.

April 13, 1984

A boy calls the BCA in an "emotional state" to describe sexual involvement with David Lambert, a teacher at Bancroft Elementary School, according to court documents. The boy had been supplying the BCA with information on Donahue with Lambert's support, documents say.

April 17, 1984

The BCA interviews Lambert about sex with the boy.

April 18, 1984

Donahue is arrested at the theater and is jailed on charges of sexually abusing three children between 1981 and 1983. A search of his home and office is conducted by the BCA minutes after his arrest. Donahue is suspended from the Children's Theatre at an emergency meeting of its board of directors.

April 19, 1984

Donahue posts \$150,000 bond and is released on bail. Lambert is arrested and charged with sexually abusing a boy. He is suspended from Bancroft. Joe Dransky is named to assume Donahue's duties as artistic director.

April 21 and 22, 1984

Two staff members of the Children's Theatre and School are suspended and two others take leaves of absence. The four are being investigated for possible criminal involvement in the case, which now includes possible abuse of girls, say BCA agents and theater officials.

April 28, 1984

Donahue begins therapy with Minneapolis Therapist William T. Seab. Seab later tells the court.

April 30, 1984

A letter is sent to local arts groups announcing formation of a defense fund for Donahue.

May 9, 1984

Christopher Michael Ryan, a 22-year-old Minneapolis editor, sues Donahue and the theater company school, alleging he was sexually

abused by Donahue when he was a student at the school in the 1970s. He asks \$60,000 in damages from the school and \$1 million in damages from Donahue.

May 11, 1984

The board of directors of the Children's Theatre Company Joseph Donahue's resignation as artistic director. The board announces a restructuring of the executive committee to be based on recommendations from five major arts organizations in the Twin Cities. It also announces the creation of six task forces to operate the theater. One of the groups is to consider establishing a child-abuse education program for students.

May 16, 1984

The Children's Theatre administration urges students to come forward with any allegations of sexual abuse by Donahue or others at school. A letter is read to students.

May 21, 1984

Donahue is formally arraigned on charges he sexually abused three boys.

May 24, 1984

BCA agents arrest two men associated with the Children's Theatre School on charges of delinquent rape. William Joseph Heron, 28, a dance teacher at the school, is accused of having sex with a 15-year-old boy in December 1983. Shawn Timothy Medalla, 23, a former student and apprentice of the school, is accused of having sex with a 15-year-old girl student on numerous occasions between April or May 1983 and early 1984.

June 26, 1984

Sara Leavitt, executive director of the Children's Theatre Company for the past three years, resigns to reassume executive directorship of the Denver Center Theater in Colorado. She says she wasn't pressured to leave and had been considering the Denver offer for some time.

July 14, 1984

John Davis Jr., former president of Madeline College and former superintendent of the Minneapolis public schools, is named interim executive director at Children's Theatre. He will serve one year.

July 16, 1984

Press negotiations for Donahue begin between Peter Thompson, attorney for Donahue, and Hennepin County Attorney Tom Johnson, according to Thompson.

July 17, 1984

Hennepin County Attorney Johnson announces that testimony on sexual abuse allegations at Children's Theatre Company will be presented to a county grand jury.

July 31, 1984

Grand jury proceedings begin in Hennepin County concerning allegations of sexual misconduct at Children's Theatre.

Aug. 22, 1984

Stephen Adamczyk, 31, a former sound technician at Children's Theatre, is indicted on charges of third-degree criminal sexual conduct involving two girls, ages 12 and 14. Both girls were involved with the theater.

Sept. 4, 1984

Students at Children's Theatre and School return to classes. In a speech to students, Executive Director Davis urges that they "become critics who can separate right from wrong, and adhere to high principles."

Sept. 5, 1984

Donahue is indicted by a Hennepin County grand jury on one charge of second-degree criminal sexual conduct involving a teen-age boy. He was previously charged with six counts of having sexual contact with three other boys.

Sept. 7, 1984

The Children's Theatre Company opens its 20th season with a revival of one of its most popular plays, Washington Irving's "The Legend of Sleepy Hollow," directed by company veteran Ben Bonicke.

Sept. 19, 1984

Wayne Jennings, 55, education director of the Children's Theatre School, is charged by a Hennepin County grand jury with two counts of failing to report suspected sexual abuse of Children's School teacher, 37, a science teacher at the school, is charged with one count of the same offense.

Sept. 25, 1984

The Children's Theatre Company's board of directors approves a sweeping reorganization plan for the company and school, including a recommendation to consider dropping its academic programs after the current school year.

Oct. 1, 1984

Donahue pleads guilty to three counts of second-degree criminal sexual conduct as part of a plea bargaining agreement that must be approved by Hennepin District Judge Charles Porter. Under the agreement, he would serve one year in the workhouse and be on probation 15 years. Bail is revoked and Donahue stayed. Case is continued until Nov. 8.

Donahue timeline

